Stories that Inspire: Engaging Learners Through Storytelling

Leanna Bonczkowski MS, RN-BC and Karen Torres MSN, RN-BC
Northwestern Medicine

Foreword: What is Storytelling?

Much more than a simple case study, storytelling in nursing education is a method of connecting a personal example to a disease process or condition to enhance learning. Storytelling is a way to provide a rich illustration of fundamental material so that the learning can not only occur but be retained (Borner, Sutphen, Leonard, & Day, 2010). The story can illustrate the patient’s experience while linking evidence and clinical practice. Storytelling can be utilized in written, verbal and digital formats (Billings, 2016).

Dedication

This poster presentation is dedicated to Carla, Jim and Sheri. This family has graciously allowed us to explore their personal journey of tragedy, courage, perseverance and triumph for the sake of nursing education. Sheri herself is a nurse, and even though she is no longer actively practicing, she continues to support her colleagues’ learning by sharing her story of recovery.

Acknowledgements

The authors wish to thank Hillary Crumlett, Clinical Director of Critical Care at Northwestern Medicine Central DuPage Hospital, who during a brainstorming session for mandatory education days, proposed the telling of a patient’s story as a topic suggestion. We would also like to thank Abby Sylvester APN as she connected us to Sheri and served as the content expert and speaker for the program that this post is based upon.

Prologue: Why Use Storytelling?

Today’s nurses educate face a variety of challenges when providing educational programs to an organization’s nurses. Many clinical acumen skills require the bedside nurse to access a higher number of educational hours annually. Teaching methods based on lecture and simple didactic sessions have fallen out of favor to more interactive learning strategies. Learners themselves have become accustomed to advanced technologies and desire to be “entertained” while they learn. Dwelling staff development resources compose those challenges. How can educators find a way to engage today’s learners and feel confident that the content provided is valuable and can be transitioned into practice?

An additional benefit of the storytelling methodology is that it allows nurses to revisit a patient they have cared for in the past and find answers to the question, “What happened to Patient X in room 2143?” Many nurses choose this profession because they find fulfillment in caring for people. However, as patients improve, nurses may forget the emotional and physical details of their case, the nurse-patient relationship becomes transient. The nurse rarely hears of the patient’s outcomes, which can leave them feeling disconnected and disconnected from the value of their work.

Audience Reviews

“I will make sure to keep the family in the forefront of my mind when taking care of their loved one.”

“LOVED this presentation and hearing the follow-up of the patient and family.”

“I enjoyed the video of the patient.”

“It was nice to see the patient after discharge to see how well she is doing.”

“Loved the case study with the family. Well done. Informative in an interesting way.”

“Very engaging.”

Chapter 2: Contact that patient.

We asked the APN to contact the patient and introduce us by phone. We asked the patient to share her story and be interviewed on videotape. Upon videotaping, we obtained written consent allowing us to use the names and images of the patient and family in our presentations.

Chapter 3: Plan how to tell the story.

A key objective was to bring the story to life for the learner. We considered inviting the patient to present her story in the live program. However, that was not logistically feasible. The patient’s health status, mobility limitations, and the patient—nurse relationship becomes transient. When presenting the patient’s story at a live session could create discomfort in the learners’ experience. We decided that videotaping would resolve these issues.

Chapter 4: Build the story according to the plan.

We formulated learning objectives centered about practice guidelines for Subarachnoid Hemorrhage. We then built a content outline where the nursing care was to be presented in a sequence that would be logical and coherent. We chose to let the story unfold in chronological order as this allowed us to tell the patient’s story from onset through recovery.

Chapter 5: Evaluate the program.

It was important to find the right balance between clinical content and emotional content to accurately portray the patient experience and provide a meaningful experience for the learner. We chose a format that portrayed the emotional content of the subject matter. Thus we edited the raw footage of the interviews to highlight key moments that best illustrated the patient’s journey. We utilized music and props to compliment the theme of the video.

Chapter 6: Tell the story.

This is where the magic happens and true learning occurs! We delivered the story to our target audience and allowed time for discussion. During this time, participants were encouraged to recall, react and respond to what they had seen and heard.

Chapter 7: Evaluate the program.

A standard continuous education (CNE) post-program evaluation was used to confirm and validate the effectiveness of the chosen teaching methodology. See the “Audience Reviews” for participant reviews. We felt it was important to properly thank the patient for her time and willingness to share. We sent her a thank you card, a small token of gratitude and an electronic copy of the finished product as a keepsake.

Afterword: Our Results

Using storytelling as a teaching methodology allowed us to reach the affective domain of learning. Hearing this patient’s story and seeing her progress toward healing and recovery helped the nursing staff appreciate the long term impact of the care they provide. The participants recalled feeling ambivalent about seeing this patient’s life without knowing what the future would bring. They also expressed pride and relief in learning that this patient did achieve a positive recovery and is able to live a meaningful life. The nurses had a newfound appreciation for the significance of what they considered to be routine, everyday care. Hearing the patient’s story brought the clinical content to life making it more applicable and relevant. This stimulated much dialogue and enthusiasm, which kept the participants engaged in the learning process.

References

Bennett, Sanphet, Leonard, & Day (2010). Book highlights from “ book that is a must read for all nurses and the nursing staff was able to receive this message; an opportunity that is so often missed when patients leave the hospital to continue their recovery at home.